**Name**: Mike Burruano & Desiree Cossette **Subject Area:** Social Studies

**Date**:July 21, 2010  **Grade Level:**  12

**Time Required:**  1 period

**Reading Skills**:

* set a purpose
* activate prior knowledge
* drawing inferences
* making connections
* drawing conclusions

**Thinking Skills**:

* define
* classify
* paraphrase
* interpret
* analyze
* appraise

**Writing/Speaking Skills**:

* brainstorming
* express opinions based on textual evidence
* speak for critical analysis & evaluation

**Title:**  The Value of Human Life

**Description**: Students have already learned about cost/benefit analysis in an earlier lesson. Students will begin the lesson by completing an anticipation guide where they brainstorm a dollar value for human life. We will then go to an insurance website and see how they give a dollar value to human life. We will propose the question, should a dollar value be placed on human life, and students will complete a discussion web. After class discussion, students will complete an exit ticket where students will respond to a question of their choice regarding the value of human life.

**Essential Questions**:

* How is cost/benefit analysis used in calculating the dollar value of human life in different situations?
* Should human life be expressed in monetary terms?

**Standards**

* ELA Standards 1, 2, 3
* Social Studies Standards 4

**Standards**:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Objectives:  *At the end of the lesson, students will be able to…* | Assessments:*I will know they can do this because they will…* |
| 1. Define terms: cost/benefit analysis, value, price | 1. complete a discussion web and use terms in class discussion |
| 2. Apply cost/benefit analysis | 2. complete a discussion web, discuss in class, and complete an exit ticket |
| 3. Judge the appropriateness of cost/benefit analysis for human life. | 3. complete a discussion web, discuss in class, and complete an exit ticket |

## Pre-Reading

**Procedure before Reading**:

1. Anticipation guide: Determine a dollar value for a human life. How did you arrive at your number? What factors did you consider? What factors made it difficult to arrive at a number?

2. Use an insurance company's calculator to determine the value of a human life.

**During Reading**

**Procedure while Reading**:

1. Discussion Web: Is it morally right to put a dollar value on human life?

2. Class discussion

## Post-Reading

**Procedure after Reading:**

1.Exit Ticket: Respond to one of the following questions. Refer to cost/benefit analysis in your response and provide at least two reasons for your opinion.

* How much value should be placed on the life of Ossama bin Laden?
* Should the life of each victim of 9/11 have the same dollar value?
* Should we place the same value on the life of a citizen from a Third World country as we do on an American life?

**Learning Styles:**

**Scaffolding:**

**Learning Styles:** auditory, visual, linguistic

**Materials**:

* anticipation guide
* website: www.dinkytown.net/java/HumanLifeValue.html
* discussion web
* article, *Civil Discussion Between Liberals & Conservatives* by Chris Crawford
* exit ticket

\*Please attach all student handouts

# [Civil Discussion Between Liberals & Conservatives](http://civildiscussionbetween.blogspot.com/)

## SATURDAY, MAY 24, 2008

### [What is the value of a human life?](http://civildiscussionbetween.blogspot.com/2008/05/what-is-value-of-human-life.html)

We Americans like to pride ourselves in our belief that we hold human life to be precious and will go to enormous lengths to save a life. Many times we see Americans insinuate their superiority over other cultures because we hold the individual to be so valuable, and they hold human life cheap (in the opinion of the speaker).  
  
This belief in the sanctity of human life is partly true and partly sham. In some cases, we go to ridiculous extremes to save a life. Consider the case some years back of the woman who was brain dead but some people didn't want to pull the plug. Even Congress got into the brouhaha by passing an absurd ad hoc law to save the life of the woman. The whole country had conniptions over the issue of saving the life of one brain-dead woman.   
  
We do much the same when it comes to the final stages of life. We spend enormous amounts of money on medical care to provide old sick people with a few more months of life. It's a terrible waste, and it's one reason why our health care costs are so high.   
  
However, Americans are hypocrites on this question. While mouthing all the sanctimonious pap about the infinite value of a human life, they turn around and kill people or let people die for trivial reasons. Let me list some examples:  
  
1. The death penalty. If life is so precious, why kill people?  
2. "Collateral damage". Whenever we execute a military operation, innocents die. We shrug our shoulders and say "Oh, well, too bad, it was unavoidable." But it was avoidable -- all we had to do was refrain from executing the military operation. If life is so precious, why do we use our military when we know that it will surely kill innocents?  
3. The bloodthirsty rhetoric of some conservatives. Now, perhaps they are entirely consistent, rejecting the notion that human life is precious while calling for the elimination of various bad people. I don't know. But the likelihood is that there is some hypocrisy here.  
4. The refusal to spend money to help save foreign lives.  
  
Here we come to one of the finer points on this issue. Many Americans think that it is \*American\* lives that are precious; foreign lives are another matter entirely. Indeed, this point is clearly driven home by the differentials in spending on health and safety. A few million dollars on food and medicine can save many thousands of lives overseas, but we instead spend that money on, say, safety improvements for our roads that might save a few dozen lives. Indeed, it is on highway safety spending that Americans really put their money where their mouths are. Every year we tens of thousands of lives are lost on America's roads. We spend many millions of dollars making those roads safer, and we have good measures for the efficacy of many safety measures. This permits us to get an estimate of exactly how much Americans really care about life.  
  
First, some background. We don't just count lives in calculations such as these. Instead, we use the "quality-adjusted life year". This is a measure of how many years of life (at what quality of life) are saved by a policy. It turns out that driver's side air bags cost about $70,000 per quality-adjusted life year saved, compared to seat belts. In other words, mandating driver's side air bags in all cars costs $X, saves Y lives, and when you run through the numbers, you find that we're spending about $70,000 for each quality-adjusted life year saved. Does that number sound about right to you? Would you be willing to spend $70,000 to get an additional year of full health? You do. Every time you buy a new car, you pay additional money for the air bag, and the chances of that air bag saving you work out to this number.   
  
But let's extend the idea. Would you be willing to spend $70,000 of your tax money to provide a fellow citizen with one year of additional healthy life? You would? But that $70,000 could probably buy 10,000 additional years of healthy life for children in Third World countries. Are American lives really worth 10,000 times as much as foreigners' lives?  
  
Let's get really messy. You would think that our policies would be consistent in how much money we pay for additional years of healthy life. You would be wrong. Our standards are all over the map. We spend millions of dollars for each quality-adjusted life year for nuclear power plants, terrorist prevention, and airplane safety. But we spend far less money for each quality-adjusted life year obtained by free medical programs for the indigent. Perhaps this can be justified with the observation that airplane crashes kill richer people who would have paid higher taxes, but medical care for the indigent doesn't add to the tax base at all. This argument collapses when you consider the children. How do we know that the 6-year old whom we deny medical check-ups to isn't going to grow up to be filthy rich and paying millions of dollars in taxes?   
  
All of this leads up to a rather odd proposal: I suggest that Congress pass a law declaring the value of one quality-adjusted life year of one American citizen. With this number established, we can then use it to guide all other policymaking. We can bring different programs into conformance so that we can get the best return for our money.  
  
The implications of this would be staggering. Next week I shall use this concept to address health care. In the meantime, I invite commentary on the value of a human life. Do I hear $80,000? $90,000?

Posted by Chris Crawford at [5:02 PM](http://civildiscussionbetween.blogspot.com/2008/05/what-is-value-of-human-life.html)